DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 399 CE 052 345

AUTHOR Kitinoja, Lisa; And Others
TITLE Undertaking an International Assignment.
PUB DATE Aug 88
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at a graduate seminar on international agricultural education at The Ohio State University (Columbus, OH, August 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Agricultural Education; Developing Nations; *Extension Education; *International Cooperation; International Education; *International Programs; *Overseas Employment; Rural Development

ABSTRACT

Agricultural and extension educators interested in international agricultural development must answer several questions to become oriented within the field before undertaking an international assignment. The questions are as follows: (1) why do you want to work internationally? (2) what do you have to offer as a professional? and (3) what is your personal philosophy concerning agricultural development? Educators who are interested and committed to working internationally must determine which institutions, organizations, and agencies are doing what in agricultural or extension education. They should prepare by studying the culture, language, and history of the region. Perhaps the most important activity is networking with personal, professional, and academic acquaintances. After getting a job and a destination, the educator should prepare to ease the transition by learning to know the other culture, getting to know the facts about the country, getting to know the subject, learning some basics about the language, involving the family, and preparing for travel. Keys to success on the job are communication, flexibility, adoption of the extension philosophy that efforts should be relevant to the recipient of the aid, and awareness of the inevitability of culture shock. To make the return easier, the educator should keep in touch while overseas and anticipate returning. (22 references.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED306399

UNDERTAKING AN INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENT

L. Kitinoja, C. Martinez and K. Escolme
Department of Agricultural Education
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio 43210
August, 1988

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L Kitinoja

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A paper presented at a Graduate Seminar on the topic of
International Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University

CE 052 345

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Undertaking an International Assignment

INTRODUCTION

For agricultural and extension educators interested in international agricultural development, several questions need to be addressed in order to become oriented within the field before undertaking an international assignment.

1) Why do you want to work internationally?

Typical reasons include the desire for personal growth, professional improvement and/or achievement of program/project goals (bin Yahya & Moore, 1986). Less appropriate reasons include escaping from a job you don't enjoy, attempting to enhance your own prestige, etc.. It is well to remember that unless you are truly committed to working in the international arena, the daily hassles and frustrations can become overwhelming, and your experience is likely to be of poor quality and little value.

2) What do you have to offer as a professional?

Of the hundreds of international and national agencies and the more than 20,000 NGOs (Hall, 1982), those that work in agricultural and extension education are only a small fraction. Determining the sorts of projects/programs now in progress or currently being planned requires doing a bit of detective work in the field. It becomes apparent that certain skills are highly appreciated and sought after-- if you are committed to becoming an international agricultural or extension educator, developing these skills becomes an imperative. Examples include language, social, organizational, facilitating and evaluating skills (Dohmen &

Niemi, 1986).

3) What is your personal philosophy concerning agricultural development?

Many agencies pursue agricultural development as part of their mission, but the meaning and purposes of development vary from agency to agency-- determining which of these uses methods or sets guidelines for projects/programs that are in line with your own philosophy is an important part of orienting yourself. One useful piece of advice is to read widely in the field of international development (bin Yahya & Moore, 1986). In addition, Dohmen and Niemi (1986) suggest that international educators need to develop a 'planetary consciousness', and seek to avoid projects/programs which are based upon our perceptions of their needs.

At the present time, several critical issues are being debated within the international agricultural development community. Streeten (1984) discusses what he terms as 'development dichotomies' including First World/Third World, center/periphery and North/South conflicts of interest, mutual benefit /dependency theories of development, formal/informal intellectual centers, neoclassic/structuralist theories, and bigger is better/ small is beautiful philosophies. And there are many more. Agricultural development is hopelessly entangled in a web of political, economic, social, cultural and technical factors-- despite many years of theory and practice, its very definition is still in question, and its very purpose is still open to debate.

Cernea (1985) in Putting People First, raises the issue of the importance of sociological variables in development projects. While the norm for the last thirty years has been to identify improved technology and attempt to educate people in the hopes that technology will 'diffuse' throughout society, with the recurrent failures of such projects, the tide is beginning to turn in favor of more people rather than technology oriented projects. As educators, we are well aware that people cannot be forced to learn; neither can they be forced to 'develop'. Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania, stated in a 1975 speech:

"Development means freedom, providing that it is development of the people. But people cannot be developed, they can only develop themselves."

Many authors have addressed this issue, and its corollary, how to enhance involvement of people in development. Chambers (1985) writes of 'putting last thinking first' and calls for a professional revolution, in which we truly begin to consider issues from the perspective of those we now call our clients. Hall (1979) and Swantz (1975) provide the example of 'participatory research'-- a philosophy that has slowly been developing into a practice within the field of adult education. Rhoades (1984) and Rhoades et al (1986) write of the interaction between farmers, postharvest scientists and anthropologists in the search for solutions to postharvest problems with potatoes in Peru. Informal research and development programs seek to encourage active participation of the local population throughout the planning,

implementation and evaluation stages of small scale, localized R&D activities (Kitinoja, 1988). Odell (1986) writes of issues and options involving local participation in extension. He recommends the avoidance of 'prescriptive' education/extension, restating that top-down development simply doesn't work.

Hall (1979) writes that the single most important question that international educators can ask themselves is: 'Whom does our work serve?' He reminds us that personal and cultural values (I would add-- those of the agency or organization we work with) are implied in any teaching or research we undertake. He states that knowledge should not be treated as a commodity to be generated by the academic community, packaged and distributed (or sold) to the rest of the world. Rather it is our responsibility to help others learn how to generate and use knowledge.

For many years, a small minority of development professionals have been suggesting that we, as scientists and educators, should have more respect for indigenous knowledge systems (Richards, 1985; Dommen, 1988). Farmers have been experimenting for millennia by selecting those materials and practices that best suit their environments. It is therefore inappropriate to approach this population as a blank slate on which to write our recommendations for 'improving' their behaviors. Box (1988:65) points out that '...cultivators acknowledge rules governing their agricultural production activities. They can inform us; they can also indicate appropriate questions for agricultural scientists to ask.'

OBTAINING SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM ASSIGNMENTS

If after wading through the mire of international agricultural development literature, you still find yourself interested in and committed to working internationally, the next step is to determine which universities/ individuals/ agencies/ NGOs are doing what, where in agricultural or extension education. Information sources include the USDA's DIALCOM, job listings in the International Programs offices of major universities and newsletters of a variety of professional organizations in agriculture. It is possible to work in a variety of capacities as an agricultural/extension educator, teaching, doing research, developing programs, evaluating educational programs, etc. Both short-term (for example, 6 weeks to 3 months for Volunteers in Overseas Assistance; 3 to 6 months for the International 4H Youth Exchange; consultancies for USAID) and long-term (for example, 3 to 4 years as a Peace Corps Volunteer; 1 to 3 years for USAID project positions; 2 to 3 year contracts with Africare) assignments are available. These can be paid or volunteer, and there are always the options of writing your own grant proposals in collaboration with professionals in country or working through university based projects.

The conventional wisdom is that the longer you can be involved, the more effective you will be. It takes time to adjust to any new culture, and short-term assignments can leave little time for anything but getting acquainted and beginning your sightseeing. On the other hand, a short-term assignment may be a

good way to test the waters, to help determine whether international work is something you'd really like to get involved with.

Authors writing about international education suggest preparing yourself by studying other cultures, languages, history, etc. of the regions in which you are most interested (Dohmen & Niemi, 1986; bin Yahya & Moore, 1986; Copeland & Griggs, 1985). In order to be a successful international educator, bin Yahya & Moore (1986) suggest that you cultivate the personality traits of flexibility, patience, independence, adaptability, enthusiasm, commitment, curiosity, persistence, sociability and respect for other cultures. While it may be too early to concentrate on a particular country, it is not too early to assess your skills and abilities and seek to develop or improve those that are most important. You will need to sell yourself in some fashion, and the more prepared you can be, the easier it will be to find positions or grants for your work. The most common path of entry into the field of agricultural development is to begin with a voluntary position. After spending several years living overseas, you are considered qualified by the major agencies amd foundations to apply for paid positions or to write grant proposals.

Perhaps the most important activity you can pursue as an individual is NETWORKING with personal, professional and academic acquaintances. Networking can lead to making key contacts in the agricultural development field, meeting people involved in international agricultural/ extension education, and hearing about

projects/programs through the grapevine. By working with people of similar mind on proposals or research projects, you can begin to broaden your knowledge base and gain experience in the field. By interacting with people from different countries, you can gain an increased understanding of the issues of agricultural/ extension education faced in other regions of the world.

The three key components of networking include: 1) Joining a professional organization, 2) carrying a set of business cards and 3) volunteering to go above and beyond job requirements (American Express, 1985).

A relatively young professional organization that is highly suitable for us as professionals is the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE). AIAEE was established in 1984 with the motto, 'committed to strengthening agricultural and extension education programs and institutions in developing countries' (Thuemmel, 1985). The association encourages active participation of all members, including graduate students, and holds an annual meeting in Washington,D C each April.

At this point, we will assume you have been successful in finding or creating a research, teaching, or extension project that suits your philosophical inclinations and that interests you intellectually, and that you are ready to prepare for a specific job.

PREPARING TO GO INTERNATIONAL

You have decided that an international experience is what you want for yourself (and your family), and you have a job and destination. Now what? There are many things to be done before you leave your home country which will ease the adjustment period to come. Total preparation is impossible, but some advance preparation can help the transition.

Learn to Know Other Cultures

Copeland and Griggs (1985) are emphatic in their advice that international travellers gain appreciation for other cultures: "American success abroad is hindered by failure to understand how cultures differ" (p. xxi). Cultural awareness can be gained while you are still in the U.S. International students are an excellent source of information about cultural differences. You will probably be able to find a student or professor who comes from the geographic area you are going to, if not from the specific country.

Get to Know the Facts About the Country

You will have thousands of questions about the country you go to. Start answering them before you go. Find out about the climate, politics, religion, and some of the local customs. Encyclopedias and travel videos a starting point. The U.S. and Foreign and Commercial Service has offices in every state and can provide orientation information. Look in a library for literature from the country; read history books; learn about national heroes.

Lots of **maps** are available - become familiar with the names of cities and towns, and regional districts.

A move will involve using different **currency**. If possible, obtain some of the new currency and practice using it. Also, **the metric system** will probably be used. Start thinking metric before you leave the U.S.; it will help you immeasureably in a new country.

Get to Know Your Subject

You are a professor in agronomy? Do you know the soil conditions and crops grown where you are going? You think you know all there is to know about social research? Have you read information about cross-cultural research? Technical subject matter and educational systems differ greatly around the world. Read international journals and books which will inform you of other ways of solving problems. Do not assume that everyone will (or should) do things your way.

Find out what you can about your job - correspond with someone in the country to see if you can bring useful materials with you. Make sure materials are appropriate.

Learn Some Basics About the Language

You may not become proficient in a new language before you arrive in another country, but you can have your ear attuned prior to going. International students would be helpful in teaching basic phrases, such as greetings. Tapes are available for a wide variety of languages. If possible, try to get at least 20 - 30 hours of instruction before you leave the U.S.

Remember Your Family

Keep your family involved in all preparation steps. Sometimes, parents worry about safety and other factors of life in another country. Share what you learn with those around you. If you are married, and if you have children, learn the language, geography, culture, and other information together. Take the time to prepare your spouse for life in another country. Make sure that your spouse and children have their own roles and goals for the time you spend overseas.

Preparation for Travel

Work closely with a GOOD travel agency. **Passports** are mandatory for each family member; check the necessities of visas. For many countries, **immunizations** will be required. An **international driver's license** obtained in your home country will aid the availability of a license in the new country. Remember, all of these preparations are not completed in one day - start the process months in advance of your departure.

Pack wisely. Check **baggage and customs restrictions** early. It may be a good idea to take a few small things to help you and your family feel at home in your new environment.

Be Prepared for Things to Be "Different"

A survey of agricultural educators who had worked internationally reported the following comments: "Don't build hopes too high" "Be prepared for the unexpected" "Be prepared for cultural shock" "Be prepared for frustrations" "Be prepared for the worst" "Expect the unexpected, which becomes the normal". You

will find the different and unexpected in your new environment. You may be frustrated, but you may also have the time of your life!

PERFORMING ON THE JOB

Now that you have decided you will find an overseas assignment rewarding and have even selected/been selected for an assignment you now face the challenge/opportunity to make your international experience everything you hope and expect that it will be.

We have already covered the first two steps for insuring success in this venture - careful consideration of your own talents and interests culminating in a carefully chosen job and thoughtful and extensive preparation before traveling abroad. The literature abounds with anecdotes about those who failed to properly prepare themselves for the culture they were about to enter - and those who didn't try at all.

It is impossible for you to leave your values and frame of reference at home, nor should you. It is important to have a full understanding of your own values and assumptions, and to know how they differ from those of the culture in which you will be operating. Your success may hinge upon just how attuned you are. Though ours is a global economy and our world is getting smaller all the time (you can find a McDonald's in many countries around the globe), it is wise to remember that "people in foreign countries who eat fast foods are no more 'Westernized' than the New Yorker who eats sushi and drives a Toyota is 'Easternized'." (Copeland, 1985). Deep down the fundamentals of culture change at a very slow pace. The beliefs and values of generations are not

so easily changed as are eating habits.

Communication

Communication is key to the success of any job, be it on foreign or familiar soil. Anyone who has ever given or received directions to an unfamiliar location knows how easy it is to send/receive the wrong message. This clearly illustrates the point that many who travel and do business abroad make; that everyone doesn't speak English, even if they do. What is meant by this is that while many of us have a working knowledge of the language of the country we will be visiting, in some instances we know just enough to get us into deep trouble...and may be embarrassed to let our hosts know that we don't fuily understand the discussion at hand. Failing to get things clarified can spell disaster.

Our communications are also heavily value laden. Our stories and anecdotes reflect our own beliefs and assumptions. While we feel that we have made our point quite clear, it is just as likely that we have totally confused the issue by interjecting a story or example. Remember that given the same problems to solve, ten different nationalities are capable of producing ten radically different solutions (each reflecting the values of their particular culture). Some points Copeland (1985) makes about communication include:

* Know where information flows
* Don't mistake a courteous answer for the truth
* Know the context to know the meaning

* Be careful of using expressions
* Silence is a form of speech
* Learn to speak body language
* Learn to speak the language

Flexibility

Probably the second key for success you'll need is that of flexibility. You might have to learn to operate by a different clock than you're accustomed to (the American clock 'runs' while in other countries is 'walks'), make do with equipment that is less than modern (a manual typewriter vs. a word processor), or do jobs that "aren't in my job description". There will probably be one thing that you can count on . . . that many things you don't expect will happen and you'll be faced with conditions that are (at best) different from what you're used to and (at worst) leave a lot to be desired. But before completely 'updating' the facilities you might find, consider the importance of accommodating the locals. Recall the tale told in class of the tractors which ended up being used to haul goods to market rather than for plowing the fields; or the fate of the tanks Rommel took into Africa during WWII. The limits of modern technology must be acknowledged and thought given to who will be using the technology once your presence is no longer required.

Management

A common role for those of us going into a foreign country will be that of manager or advisor. While there will be cultural differences, it is unnecessary to throw out everything you know

about managing people. . .just temper it with what you have learned about the culture you are entering. Know why people work and how the job fits into their life, employ appropriate rewards and motivators, show personal concern for your employees and look and act the part of manager if you expect to have the respect of your employees. You should also check into local labor policies - in many foreign countries (unlike the U.S.) it is easy to hire employees but very difficult to discharge them.

Philosophy

You would do well to remember the extension philosophy paraphrased here: "If you give a man a fish, he eats for a day; if you teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime". Development is a multifaceted or wholistic process (spiritual, social and physical) (ECOP, 1985). The literature stresses the need to make efforts relevant to the small, limited income inhabitant; to understand the cost of risk for a subsistence farmer, and the fear that Third World people have of being too strongly influenced by U.S. policy and culture. You must be knowledgeable of, and sensitive to the circumstances and constraints faced by the host country and seek creative approaches to dealing with their problems. To put this in context, this poem reflects the feelings of those recipients of aid:

I am the one who comes to the city once in a while...
I am the one who looks in awe at the city with an open mouth...
I am the one who struggles from sunrise to sunrise to bring a better product to your table...
I am the one who thinks everyone has turned their back to me...
I am the one with calloused hands and a grieving spirit...
yet with the hope of a better tomorrow.

I don't know if my children will be able to continue their education; they walk barefoot and sometimes cry from hunger.
My shack has a shattered roof, and my five children sleep in the same uncovered bed.
But I dislike being called 'poor peasant'
Even though I am a poor peasant.
I have pride and I am deeply human...
and can show that I am responsible...
Just give me the opportunity and I shall produce...
I shall produce a better tomorrow for my family and for my country.

- By a farmer in Costa Rica

Mental Health

The personal component of performing a job overseas deals with the stress you will encounter dealing with a foreign culture, more commonly known as culture shock. Everyone experiences this to an extent, and Brock (1970) emphasizes that "the more 'exotic' the alien society and the deeper one's immersion in its social life, the greater the shock...One's customary categories of experience are no longer useful, and habitual actions elicit seemingly bazarre responses...[A person] is often unsure whether he has gone mad or whether all the people around him are crazy - perhaps both." (p. ix-x). The ambiguity, uncertainty and impredictability of the situation in which expatriots find themselves cause reduced ability to interact within this unknown social structure and produce culture shock.

Culture shock is characterized by such symptoms as perceived lack of control, a sense of helplessness, social isolation, status inconsistency and inability to predict anything. Just as there is no miracle cure for cancer and no effortless way to lose weight, ther is no magic formula for acquiring understanding and

adjustment without assaulting old habit and thought patterns, facing unsureness, risking change and using large amounts of energy (Landis, 1983).

Some of the not so positive responses to culture shock include regression, yearning for home, becoming dependent on others, displacement, rationalization, repression and being excessively concerned with unimportant details (something which the expatriot feels able to conquer). While you should try not to become too enmeshed in these coping responses, many of them are automatic and may take over without your realization. The best way to lessen the strain is by advanced preparation (Landis, 1983), "not in the form of information about the country of destination, but through knowledge about oneself, the nature of the stress of culture shock, and various coping mechanisms. Simply knowing that there is a likelihood of culture shock occuring and that it is a stress reaction [will help you] to allow for its effects and to cope with the problems it causes. In other words, forewarned is forearmed.

RETURNING FROM YOUR INTERNATIONAL POSITION

Returning to your home country after an international experience is harder than it sounds. Some people think it is easier to go through culture shock. You and your family will be significantly changed by your experiences. Old friends may express interest in your experience, but then have little willingness to listen. Your job abroad may have provided you with a lot of autonomy and an elevated social status - coming back to your old position may seem very mundane. What can you do to settle in a bit easier? Here are some tips:

1. Keep in touch with family, friends, and work associates while you are gone. Frequent communication while abroad will help ease your return. Have a "sponsor" at work to look after your interests and keep your name alive to prevent your falling behind colleagues while away.
2. Do your homework before coming back to the U.S. Check on schools, employment opportunities, and real estate well in advance of your return. Write to people and tell them that you're coming back - create anticipation!
3. Think of ways to communicate your experiences to others, and take the time to share with others. But don't expect everyone to be as excited as you are. Condense your experience into two or three significant things.
4. Remember to listen to the experiences of those who remained

at home - they will have changed, too.

5. Find new friends with international experience - don't expect old friends to meet all of your needs.
6. Find new ways to use your newly developed talents - don't limit yourself to what you did before you left.
7. Remember your experiences by cooking foods you learned to like and maintaining contact with friends abroad.

An international experience can be life changing for you and others. Start orienting yourself by getting an international perspective. Meet with others who are either from other countries, or have worked abroad. Read widely in your subject area. Find out about other cultures - learn a language! Discuss the move with your family, friends and employer. Prepare well before you go, and do your job to the best of your ability while you are abroad. Keep in touch while you are gone, and be ready to communicate when you return. Have a great time!

References

Axelrod, V M and Magisos, J E (1988) So you'd like to manage an international project! Ohio State University.

bin Yahya, I and Moore, G E (1986) On becoming a sucessful international educator NACTA Journal 30 (June):56-59

Bochner, S (1986) Training inter-cultural skills In: Hollin C R and Traver P (Eds) Handbook of Social Skills Training Oxford: Pergamon Press

Box, L (1988) Experimenting cultivators: A method for adaptive agricultural research Sociologia Ruralis 28(1):62-75

Brislin, R W et al (1973) Cross-cultural research methods N Y: Wiley and Sons

Cernea, M M (1985) Sociological knowledge for development projects In: Cernea (Ed) Putting people first: sociological variables in rural development World Bank: Oxford Univ Press

Chambers, R (1985) Putting 'last' thinking first: a professional revolution Third World Affairs 1985 Third World Foundation for Social and Economic Studies

Copeland L and Griggs,L (1985) Going International NY: Random House

Dohmen, G and Niemi, J (1986) Int'l Adult Education: Our developing interests and responsibilities and what it means to be an Int'l Adult Educator. (ED 277 881)

Dommen, A J (1988) Innovation in African Agriculture Boulder: Westview Press

Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (1985) Proceedings of the international role of extension: Future directions conference. Michigan State University.

Fitzgerald, M (1985) 4-H and the Peace Corps - a successful partnership. Extension Review, 56 (4) 10-11.

Hall, B (1979) Participatory research: breaking the academic monopoly In: J A Niemi Viewpoints on Adult Education Research p.43-70 (ED 179 782)

Kitinoja, L (1988) Informal R and D for Agricultural Development: Key Roles of Agricultural and Extension Educators. A paper presented at the Caribbean meeting of the Assn for Ag and Ext Ed (AIAEE) (August 9, 1988)

Landis, D and Brislin R W (1983) Handbook of intercultural training. Vol II: Issues in training methodology N Y: Pergamon Press

Odell, M J (1986) 'People, power and a new role for agricultural extension: issues and options involving local participation and groups' In: Jones, G E (Ed) Investing in Rural Extension: Strategies and Goals p.169-177

Rhoades. R E et al (1986) In: Jones J R and Wallace B J Social sciences and farming systems research: methodological perspectives on agricultural development Boulder: Westview

Rhoades, R E (1984) Breaking New Ground: Agricultural Anthropology Lima, Peru:CIP

Richards, P (1985) Indigenous Agricultural Revolution: Ecology and Food production in West Africa Boulder, Colo: Westview Press

Streeten, P P (1984) Development dichotomies In: World Bank Pioneers in Development Wash, D C : World Bank

Swantz, M L (1975) Research as an educational tool for development Convergence 8: 44-53

Thuemmel, W L (1985) The Association for Int'l Agricultural Education: Professionals with Passports The Ag Ed Magazine 57(7):21-22